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ARMS DEALING

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Breakdown of a freelance gun-running operation

LAST TUESDAY in Parliament the Prime Minister deplored the "dangerous practice under which arms are transferred from Governments to private salesmen who have been going all over the world selling arms to trouble-makers." Just 48 hours later, in Bedfordshire, fresh traces appeared of the international arms racket: a Frenchman named Paul Bonte rang the office of a transport firm at Dunstable, and demanded delivery of 100 parachutes stored there.

Paul Bonte is one of three mysterious Frenchmen who, aided by an ex-operative of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, tried earlier this year to parachute £98,000 worth of Communist-made arms into Algeria. Ever since that attempt ended with the arrest in Malta of their aircraft and its crew, it seems that Bonte and his fellow-promoters—who totally escaped the rather cursory publicity over the incident—have been working to rebuild their aerial smuggling system. Judging by certain conversations in Brussels during the last few weeks, and Bonte's sudden demand for the parachutes (which were bought for a drop planned some months ago) they may have been having some success.

Investigation of their first attempt, which failed merely through the hilarious incompetence of some of their employees, reveals not only the surprising ease with which arms can be bought and clandestinely shifted around Europe: but also the fact that some Western and Communist Governments seem curiously powerless in dealing with the situation.

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